DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 437 UD 021 486

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TITLE Major School Desegregation Problems: A Status Report.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 14p.: Paper presented at the symposium on "School Desegregation Issues Relevant to School Administrators" at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Los Angeles, CA, April, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role: *Affirmative Action: *Desegregation Effects: *Desegregation Methods: Elementary Secondary Education: *Metropolitan Areas: Racial Integration: *Racial Relations: *School Desegregation: Teacher Role: Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

Several problems regarding the desegregation process can be identified. First, the population shift of urban whites to surrounding suburbs has hindered urban school desegregation and metropolitan desegregation plans have proved politically unsuccessful. Second, the number of black administrators lags far behind the number of black students. In addition, the product of the desegregation process, the desegregated school, shows many deficiencies and is a place where true racial integration has yet to occur. Solutions to the first two problems include metropolitan desegregation and meaningful affirmative action. The teaching profession must act as an effective advocate of these policies. Resolution of the third problem, reforming the desegregated school itself, requires a concerted effort on the part of teachers and administrators to promote positive interracial experiences. (Author/APM)

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ED204437

Major School Desegregation Problems:

A Status Report

by Frederick P. Venditti

Paper presented at the symposium on "School Desegregation Issues Relevant to School Administrators" at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Los Angeles, California, April 1981.

UD 021486

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MAJOR SCHOOL DESEGREGATION PROBLEMS:
A STATUS REPORT

As my contribution to our symposium this morning, I propose to make a status report on school desegregation as seen from the perspective of one who has had nearly thirty years of experience with the process of school desegregation as practitioner in the public schools and as professor/researcher/technical assistance specialist in higher education. From my perspective, I shall identify and discuss briefly what seem to me to be the truly major problems now confronting us vis-a-vis school desegregation, more than a quarter of century after Brown. In passing, I shall call attention to certain very recent developments that inspire both optimism and pessimism with regard to the progress we may reasonably expect to make in dealing with these problems. Finally, I shall be so presumptuous as to offer opinions on what might be done to solve or ameliorate these problems.

TWO TYPES OF PROBLEMS

As I see it, there are two broad types of problems impeding school desegregation today. The first of these has to do with process and is two-fold. The second type has to do with product. I shall now discuss each type briefly.

The Two-Fold Process Problem

The major process problem is, specifically, that current desegregation strategies are no longer producing satisfactory results, either in terms of student assignment or the elevation of blacks to the higher echelons of administration. In both connections the desegregation process has waned drastically in effectiveness and will continue to do so unless it is deliberately and systematically improved.

To understand our situation relative to the first aspect of our process-

type problem, pupil desegregation, a bit of historical perspective is needed. Through the years since the landmark Brown decision of 1954, the most significant desegregation has been achieved as a result of a series of federal court decisions.[1] These decisions have had the aggregate effect of requiring more and more biracial assignment of boys and girls in the public schools, particularly in the South, despite steadfast resistance on the local level. However much some of us might wish otherwise, state-mandated and locally-voluntary desegregation efforts pale in significance when compared with desegregation required by federal court orders. In school district after school district, schools have been desegregated grudgingly, only after federal courts have demanded that action be taken, and only in the face of bitter local opposition. (Parenthetically, this is not to disparage the efforts of states such as Illinois, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New York, and Wisconsin which have voluntarily promoted desegregation through effective policy directives and financial support.[2])

Nor has the court-ordered process of pupil desegregation been swift and steady. Rather, it has been slow and sporadic. One result of delay and uncertainty attendant with court action has been that a pervasive demographic transformation of our urban area, proceeding relentlessly and at a quickening pace over the past quarter century, has vitiated the effectiveness of mandatory desegregation in many of our most important cities. This demographic phenomenon is the broad-scale shifting of white and, to a lesser degree, black, middle-class population from within the boundaries of most of of our larger American cities to the suburban areas surrounding them. This shift has been occurring most obviously ever since the end of World War II, accelerated only to a limited degree by school desegregation.

It is the end result of this massive population movement in juxtaposition with court-ordered school desegregation in so many of our larger cities that

is important in this discussion. We have now arrived at a time when desegregation in these cities has or is being defeated, or faces defeat in the future, by middle-class movement to the suburbs.[3] In other words, even court-ordered desegregation of large city school systems accomplishes little, e.g., as in Memphis and Detroit, when it results finally, because of basic demographic change, primarily in shuttling black children from one predominantly black school to another.

Thus, the desegregation process for assigning children to schools in many of our most important population centers falters today and will apparently become progressively even more ineffectual, unless and until metropolitan plans are implemented. But the federal courts will not impose such plans except under certain circumstances, that is, in situations in which all parties have been proven guilty of segregative practices,[4] as in Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky, and Wilmington-New Castle County, Delaware. It now seems that only strong state or local support for metropolitan desegregation will activate this tool. Today such support is most conspicuous by its absence.

It is true that in January 1981, the St. Louis Board of Education asked a federal district court to require 40 suburban school systems lying in three counties to participate in metropolitan desegregation plan. It is also true that the NAACP has filed its own request for such a merger.[5] Here are tenuous grounds for optimism on the part of proponents of metropolitan desegregation. But such optimism must be restrained in light of these developments: The State of Missouri filed papers at the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on February 19, 1981, which makes clear the State's intention to continue stauchly its resistance to assisting in any significant way with desegregation, metropolitan or otherwise, in the St. Louis area.[6] And casting an even deeper pall over present prospects for efficacious metropolitan desegregation

are these developments: First, another anti-busing Senate bill (i.e., The Neighborhood School Act of 1981, S 528) was introduced February 24, 1981. Second a letter dated February 24, 1981 was sent by Senator Strom Thurmond R - S.C.) to the U.S. Attorney General requesting that the government consider the dismissal of four very recent school desegregation suits (i.e., Marshall, Texas; Lima, Ohio; Yonkers, N.Y.; and Charleston, S.C.). The trial of these cases might have important positive ramifications for metropolitan desegregation.[7] Given these and other similar recent developments, one must, indeed, put on the rosiest of glasses to view the current state of metropolitan desegregation optimistically.

With regard to the second facet of the major process problem stated at the outset of this discussion, a failure in the context of the general school desegregation movement to elevate adequate numbers of blacks to administrative positions, history and statistics speak starkly for themselves. In the south, in the days of the so-called "dual school system," there were thousands of black elementary- and secondary-school principals. As various writers have observed, however, by the time this type of de-jure system had been eliminated in the region, such professionals had become virtually "extinct." They were simply nowhere to be found in the desegregated schools that were created ultimately in the crucible of court-ordered desegregation. Actually, as most knowledgeable individuals both inside and outside the profession were aware, former black principals for the most part had been reassigned as assistant principals in newly-created desegregated schools or as federal project directors or other such low-visibility personnel in the central office.

Blacks are once again beginning to appear in small numbers as principals in desegregated schools in the South. Nationally the trend is also evident. Taken as a whole, however, available statistics indicate that in the public

schools (K-12) blacks have not been promoted to administrative positions in numbers commensurate with the number of black children in the total school population. For example, in 1978 (the latest year for which figures are available), when black children comprised 15.2 percent of the total school enrollemnt below college level[8], less than 11.7 percent of all school administrators were black.[9] Until this type of obvious disparity has been eliminated nationwide, it certainly cannot be said that the desegregation process is working in an equitable manner with regard to employment opportunities for blacks.[10]

The Product Problem

I turn now to the second type of problem alluded to at the outset, the problem of product. What I'm talking about in this connection is the product of the desegregation process: desegregated schools. These schools enroll in varying proportions both black and white students. Ideally, they should be exemplars of interracial harmony and understanding and seedbeds for nurturing children and youth in a way that will prepare them to live and work eventually in the society at large in such manner as to cleanse it of all racist taints. In reality, I believe we must face up to the fact that many, if not most, of the desegregated schools in our land -- and particularly desegregated secondary schools -- fall far short of this ideal.

Experience, observation, and reading of the literature lead me to the gloomy conclusion that the typical desegregated school, tragically, is a place in which integration has yet to occur, if one defines the integrated school as a place where students of different races genuinely understand and appreciate each other and benefit equally from all facets of their educational program. In contrast with this ideal, I fear that the typical desegregated school is one in which there will be found many unfortunate second-generation desegregation problems, such as obvious voluntary resegregation, marked

minority-group isolation and alienation, debilitating interpersonal and intergroup tensions, and severe curricular and instructional deficiencies vis-a-vis a multicultural student body.

I suspect that the typical majority-white desegregated secondary school is most likely to exemplify these unwholesome characteristics. In it one will observe very little casual biracial association, heavily disproportionate white participation in student government and extra-class activities (e.g., clubs and social events such as proms), allegations of a "double standard" regarding academics and conduct on the part of both blacks and whites, a heavily disproportionate black suspension and absentee rate, and differential achievement as measured by grades and tests, strongly favoring white students.[11]

An important point to be mentioned in connection with the deficiencies of the typical desegregated school is the fact that these shortcomings are frequently not recognized by many in the school and community. Furthermore, people in the position to do most about them, especially school administrators and teachers, are unfortunately prone to ignore and inadvertently, if not deliberately, exacerbate the deficiencies to the serious detriment of minority children, be they black or white.

Problem Summary

To summarize briefly, it is my contention that there are currently two serious types of desegregation problems confronting us, one of which relates to process and one to product. The major double-pronged process-type problem is increasingly ineffectual student desegregation approaches and inadequate provisions for upward mobility of blacks within the profession. The product-type problem is exemplifed by the desegregated school which has yet to become truly integrated, that is, a place where all students relate naturally and positively to each other irrespective of race and truly share

equally the benefits of the educational program. The question to be answered now is what, if anything, can be done to resolve these intractable problems?

SOLUTIONS: ACTION BY THE PROFESSION

In my judgment, with respect to each of the problems identified in this discussion, solutions will be found only if members of the teaching profession itself -- teachers and administrators -- make the resolution of the problems a moral and educational imperative. Let me suggest some ways in which I believe the profession needs to act.

Advocacy for Metropolitan Desegregation

As I've stated, effective pupil desegregation will be accomplished, if at all, in many places only through locally- or state-initiated metropolitan approaches. But no force outside the courts has yet materialized or appears likely to materialize fortuitously to galvanize such a movement. What is lacking is an advocacy group willing to act as the conscience of local communities where meaningful school desegregation is being evaded because traditional court-ordered remedies are no longer productive. The teaching profession, if it has the conviction and courage, can mobilize itself to function as such an advocacy group.

Nor should it be necessary, as it plays its advocacy role, for the profession to ignore pervasive middle-class fears that school desegregation destroys the effectiveness of educational programs. While stressing the moral obligation to desegregate American public schools, the profession can and should point to a respectable body of research that tells us that desegregation is not academically detrimental to either black or white children and that there are strong indications that the benefits which accompany early experience in a desegregated environment produce positive achievement results from black pupils.[12]

The profession has advanced far with respect to handling "bread and

butter" issues -- even though it still has far to go -- through skillful public relations efforts and astute, hard-headed political action. The record demonstrates dramatically that the profession can be a significant change agent, even when confronted by a recalcitrant public, when it pursues patently moral, educationally sound goals through systematic, determined, and unified action. Therefore, it can and should champion actively metropolitan desegregation approaches.

Meaningful Affirmative Action

When it comes to the matter of attaining equity within the profession as far as minority-group promotions are concerned, it is again true that the profession itself -- if it really wishes -- can muster the influence needed to compel boards of education and established administrative bureaucracies to formulate and implement genuinely effective affirmative action plans. The official Office of Civil Rights (OCR) interpretation of the meaning of the Bakke decision with regard to affirmative action makes it clear that the affirmative action concept has not been robbed of all viability.[13] Meaningful avenues to equity in the sphere of employment practices are still very much open. What is needed, as with respect to attainment of effective pupil desegregation strategies, is a dedicated advocacy group actively committed to securing in our nation's school systems employement practices equitable for all -- whites, blacks, other minorities, and yes, most certainly, women.

The profession itself can function as such an advocacy group and accomplish the desired objectives if it makes the effort another of its moral and educational imperatives. Indeed, with its know-how and potential for exerting powerful leverage internal to itself for the betterment of its members, the profession can probably correct the employement practices deficiency in the school desegregation process even more rapidly and surely than it can remedy the deficiencies of that process in regard to pupil assignment.

Serious commitment to action is the crucial requirement.

Reforming Desegregated Schools

When it comes to the product problem, integrating the merely desegregated school, it is once again distinctly incumbent upon the profession itself to assume major responsibility for providing the solution. I strongly agree with two systematic investigators of the desegregated school who have spoken to this matter as follows:

> Much emphasis has been placed on the undeniably important roles of community processes, economic conditions, leadership in the minority and majority communitites, social history of the communities, and public policy. But education, effective or otherwise, takes place in the schools. If the academic achievement of students is to be increased, it will be through instruction and practice, not through community politics. If positive interracial experiences are to occur among students, they will occur in the interactions of the students themselves. It falls to people in the schools -- teachers, principals, counselors, paraprofessionals -- to organize the multidimensional activities that go into the educational process in the constant endeavor to make that process beneficial to students. Effective integration can be achieved by, and only by, people in the schools.[14]

It has been my observation that where teachers and administrators have made the most determined and successful efforts to integrate schools, targeted federal funds dispensed by such means as ESAA and Title IV grants have been the foundation of their success. Such programs have usually furnished both the incentive and substantive wherewithal needed for significant reform in desegregated schools. It is with considerable dismay, therefore, that I contemplate the advent of the much publicized block grant approach to assisting eduction from the federal level. This latest, proposed panacea for our educational ills, so attractive in so many theoretical ways as an alternative to federal waste, overregulation, and ineptitude, will make immeasurably more difficult for teachers and administrators the already Augean task of integrating our schools.[15] In my view, if the block grant program is enacted, local and state efforts and allocations of funds for school integration are hence-

forth very likely to be tokens at best in many places. Therefore, at the very time when the profession must take bold initiatives if desegregated schools are to be made viable, the most reliable, even if far from perfect tool for doing the job, federal categorical assistance, is apparently to be taken away. It is easy to lose heart in the face of such a reversal.

But proponents of integrated schools must not lose heart. They must remember that the all-important Brown decision said in part,

> Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal...To separate (black children) from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.[16]

I believe firmly that segregated schools also affect in the most destructive way imaginable the hearts and minds of white children. Segregated schooling deprives them of understanding and appreciation of the racial and ethnic diversity that is the essence of our democratic society and leaves them in their ignorance unprepared to be truly functional citizens of a democracy, much less citizens of the world. Therefore, for the benefit of <u>all</u> our children and, indeed, ultimately our <u>entire society</u>, I firmly believe that our schools must be desegregated. I believe firmly that unequitable employment practices not only deprive their victims of their rights but also rob the profession of the inestimable strengths it would have were it as diversified as it should and could be from the standpoint of race and sex. I believe firmly that unwholesome desegregated schools must be transformed into microcosms of the democratic society we proclaim proudly to the rest of the world that we are. Finally, I believe firmly that the teaching profession may be the only agent capable of spearheading meaningful desegregation of our schools, assuring equity of employment in its own ranks, and transforming the typical desegregated school from a "pothole of pestilence" to a "beacon of brilliance."[17] The unanswered question in my mind is, dare we hope the profession will recognize and accept the awesome challenge confronting it?

[1]See, among the numerous chronological reviews of federal court decisions responsible for increasing school desegregation over the years, M. Euler and D. L. Parham, A Citizen's Guide to School Desegregation Law (Washington: The National Institute of Education, 1978) and Race Equity in Education, ed. F. Aquila (Bloomington, Indiana University, School of Education, 1979).

[2]State Leadership Toward Desegregating Education: A Positive Future (Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States, November, 1980), p. 5.

[3]For detailed information and discussion regarding failing desegregation efforts in our large cities and the implications of these failures, see the following publications of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights: Equal Opportunities in Suburbia (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), which details the extent of which racial isolation in metropolitan areas has been exacerbated by governmental and private actions; Twenty Years After Brown, which documents the increasing racial separation of city and suburban schools; and Desegregation of the Nation's Schools: A Status Report, especially p. 21 whereon data showing the intensity of segregation in 262 metropolitan school districts are given.

[4]See Milliken v. Bradley, 418 U.S. 717 (1974), in which case the court vacated a judgment imposing an interdistrict remedy on the grounds that there was no showing that intentional segregation in one district had interdistrict effects.

[5]School Law News, Volume 9, Number 2., January 16, 1981, pp. 1 and 2.

[6]Schools and Civil Rights News, Volume 5, Number 5, March 5, 1981, p. 9.

[7]Department of Education Weekly, Volume 2, Number 13, March 9, 1981, p. 7.

[8]This figure is derived from data given in U.S. Department of Commerce, School Enrollment -- Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1978 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office 1979), pp. 11-12.

[9]Statistical Abstract of the United States, 100th Ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 417.

[10]A particularly significant dimension of the problem not broadly verifiable by hard data available at the time of writing of this article is the fact -- at least as observed by the writer in Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee -- that blacks tend to be especially unrepresented in central office administrative positions, e.g., instructional supervisor, assistant superintendent, superintendent, other than those connected with procurement and oversight of federal grant projects. In Tennessee, for example, according to statistics compliled by N. Mertz, MAARDAC Newsletter, (Knoxville, Tennessee: College of Education, 1979), p. 2, in 1978 only 6 percent of all assistant superintendents in the state were black.

[11]Detailed documentation and discussion of these deficiencies will be found in the following sources: F. Brazil, "Intergrating the Desegregated School," The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, LX (February, 1976), pp. 80-84; R. Mills and S. Nelson, Testing Grouping: The New Segregation in Southern Schools (Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Regional Council, 1976); G. Forehand and M. Rogosta, A Handbook for Intergrated Schooling (Princeton, N.J.:

Educational Testing Service, 1976); F. Venditti, "Second-Generation School Desegregation Problems: A Perspective Provided by the Majority-White Secondary School," The Educational Catalyst, VIII (Spring, 1978), pp. 100-108; and W. Weinberg, Minority Students: A Research Appraisal (Washington, D.C.: The National Institute of Education, 1977).

[12]See C. Bullock, "Desegregating Urban Areas: Is It Worth It? Can it be done?" School Desegregation, Shadow and Substance (University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 125-142; W. Hawley, "The New Methodology of School Desegregation" and "Increasing the Effectivenss of School Desegregation: Lessons from the Research," working papers from Center for Educational Policy, Duke University, 1979; M. Reagan, "Five Educational Effects of Busing Pupils," The American School Board Journal, 161 (March, 1978), pp. 18-23; N. St. John, School Desegregation: Outcomes for Children (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975); and M. Weinberg, "White Chilren in the Desegregation Process," Integrated Education VII (July-August, 1974), pp. 40-41. Recent corroboration of the possibility of obtaining positive educational results in a thoroughly desegregated school system was furnished by the Nashville Metropolitan School System. It revealed, as reported in The Tennessean, May 19, 1980, that Metro students' achievement test scores for the 1979-80 school year equaled or exceeded national norms on most grade levels and fell only one or two percentile points below the norms otherwise.

[13]This policy interpretation was issued by the Office for Civil Rights under the procedures announced in the Federal Register on May 1, 1978, 43 FR 18630. It interprets the Department's regulation issued under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

[14]Garlie A. Forehand and Majorie Ragosta, A Handbook for Intergrated Schooling (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1976), p. 2.

[15]Department of Education Weekly, Volume 2, Number 11, (Washington, D.C.: Fiestritzer Associates, Inc., February 23, 1981), pp. 1-5; and Volume 2, number 14, (March 18, 1981), pp. 1-5; Education Daily, Volume 14, Number 32, (Washington: Capitol Publishers, Inc., February 18, 1981), pp. 1-2.

[16]Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483, Brown (1954).

[17]K. Goldhammer, Elementary School Principals and their Schools: Beacons of Brilliance and Potholes of Pestilence, by Gerald Becker and others, under the direction of K. Goldhammer (Eugene, Oregon: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, the University of Oregon, 1971).